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Indian Host



Text By: Adam Renton

If you've never been to the UK you'd probably find it hard to understand why a pasty-faced white boy like me loves Indian food so much. You probably couldn't get your head around the fact that so many British people regard Indian cuisine almost as their own. Certainly, when I was living in England, a week wouldn't go by when I wouldn't eat an Indian curry at least once.

From the 1950s onwards, huge numbers of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent settled in Britain, bringing with them a technical expertise with herbs and spices that would save the British from their bland staple diet of meat and two veg. Indian food has made such an impact that it is Chicken Tikka Masala that is now considered the UK's most popular dish. Indian restaurants are everywhere – an area of my hometown Manchester, for example, is known as "The Curry Mile" a long neon-lit strip whose eateries and kebab shops are patronised until the early hours of the morning.

Finding good Indian food outside of England is a perennial problem (I've never been to India but I'd guess it's probably not bad there). On the occasions that I've tried it in Bangkok it's been overly oily and only passable at best.

Furnished stylishly and brightly with a large glass frontage, Indian Host isn't the kind of Anglo-Indian restaurant that you tend to stumble into at 4am, where the walls are stained yellow by nicotine and a pint of draft Carlsberg is as ubiquitous as cigarette burns in the tablecloths, a group of singing drunks and a man next to you being sick in his lap, all to a Bollywood theme tune played through tinny speakers. (Nothing wrong with those places, by the way!)

Curry and beer will always be happy bedfellows. However, specialising in Northern Indian cuisine (with some Indo-Chinese dishes too), Indian Host emphasises high quality food, lovingly cooked in its clay tandoor oven, which can just as easily be appreciated with wine. The menu features dishes like Rogan Josh, Bhuna Gosht and Aloo Ghobi that would be familiar to any fan of Anglo-Indian cuisine.

Sharing the meal between three people, we kicked off with some tandoor-fired starters – Chicken Malai Kebab (boneless pieces of chicken, marinated in royal cumin enriched cream, cheddar, garlic and fresh coriander, B275) and Bhatti Da Chicken, a

house speciality, prepared to the chef's secret recipe and marinated overnight (B275). There was nothing paltry about either of these soft and tender pieces of chicken, both accentuated with mildly spicy flavours. They were simply in a class above your average tandoori chicken, signalling that perhaps we could be about to sample something special.

That something came in the form of Kabuli Raan – a leg of baby lamb, spiked with rum, pot roasted in Indian spices, royal cumin, cardamom and bay leaves and once again, cooked in the tandoor (half B375/full B695).

The super supple meat fell from the bone as freely as a lemming from a cliff, as if the lamb in question knew that it was destined to be an integral part of a truly special dish. And what an incredible, subtle spicy flavour to enhance the tender meat! This was really one of the best dishes – from any cuisine – that I've tasted in Bangkok.

A generous serving of Chicken Biryani (B275) was then accompanied by various curries – Dal Tadka (yellow lentils B150), Mutton "Authority" (dry pieces of boneless lamb, named after the area of Delhi where the owner first sampled this dish, B275) and of course, Chicken Tikka Masala (chunks of chicken in a creamy tomato sauce flavoured with spices, B250).

All were lovingly crafted with clearly distinguishable flavours, which is not always the case in curry houses that overly rely on the use of oil or ghee to cook their food. In fact, there was only one thing noticeably missing from every dish: oil. I've never tasted Indian food that was so light, so clean and so lacking in oil. Because let's face it – Indian food might be some of the tastiest around but it's never going to be the healthiest. At Indian Host it seems you can put your worries about your waistline to one side and concentrate on enjoying superb food that isn't going to leave you bloated or belching all the way home.

That theme continued with a fine array of Indian desserts including Kulfi (Indian ice cream), Gajjar Ka Halwa (carrot julienne and dry fruits cooked in sweet milk) and Gulab Jamun (dried condensed milk dumplings deep fried and soaked in cardamom syrup) – all B95 – that won't burst your stomach either.

I left full, contented and feeling slightly unpatriotic. The food at Indian Host is not as good as most of the Indian food that you find in England. It's better.

Indian Host
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